



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Department of Housing  
and Community Development

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**Contact:** Hollie S. Cammarasana  
Public Relations Director, DHCD  
(804) 371-7006  
(804) 382-2075 cell  
[hollie.cammarasana@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:hollie.cammarasana@dhcd.virginia.gov)

### ***Governor to address attendees at Creative Economies conference***

*Southwest Virginia has seen rapid increase in tourism based on heritage tourism and creative economies uniting artisans, agriculture, music and more*

**Richmond, VA** – According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation, five of the 15 localities with the greatest increase in tourism expenditures from 2005 to 2006 were in Southwest Virginia along the Crooked Road. Tazewell, Smyth, Russell, Dickenson and the City of Norton posted an 8.9 percent increase in tourism, over the state's 7.2 percent change.

What happened? The economy changed. A new "creative economy" is replacing the manufacturing economy in Southwest Virginia, capitalizing on synergies between music, crafts, agriculture, the arts, and downtown revitalization.

The "Creative Economy" concept is the focus of the "Building a Creative Economy in Southwest Virginia" conference, being held May 19 and 20 at the Virginia Higher Education center in Abingdon.

"The creative economies concept for this conference is based on the economic restructuring happening in Southwest Virginia," said Governor Timothy Kaine, who is scheduled to speak at the conference along with Senator William Wampler and Congressman Rick Boucher.

"From the revitalization of downtowns and the creation of artisan trails to highlight music, crafts and agriculture, the development of organic farms and green lumber, and the expansion of venues and attractions that are preserving and showcasing the heritage of the region, the new economy in Southwest Virginia is based on the heritage tourism model" said Kaine.

Heritage and cultural tourism efforts in Southwest Virginia are becoming increasingly coordinated, high visibility efforts drawing national recognition.

- *The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail*, has been featured in USA Today, Southern Living magazine, The Washington Post, National Geographic Traveler, and more. In the past three years, more than 40 new businesses have developed in downtown areas along *The Crooked Road*. With continued growth expected in the future, *The Crooked Road* organization is seeking a new director to lead the organization into the future.

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- *'Round the Mountain*, a network of the artisans in 19 counties and four cities in Southwest Virginia, continues developing new trails which will lead tourists to artisan studios, farms, regional galleries, artisan centers, and other regional attractions as they enjoy locally grown produce and the cultural diversity of the region.
- *Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway*, a \$16 million artisan center on the campus of Virginia Highlands Community College, is in final design. The center will be the focal point and portal to all heritage tourism sites in the region, connecting visitors to *the Crooked Road*, *Wilderness Road*, regional artisan venues and craft trails, and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout Southwest Virginia.

Ground is expected to be broken this fall on the facility, which market studies estimate will draw 270,000 visitors and generate \$2.2 million in revenue each year from the sale of crafts, food, and beverages.

- *Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission*, established by the 2008 General Assembly, will be the coordinating body for the mix of cultural heritage and tourism economic development efforts throughout the Virginia. The will be composed of 23 members – five legislative, 11 non-legislative citizen members, and seven ex officio members. Governor's appointments to the Commission are expected to be named this summer.
- *Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD)*, focused on developing a healthy and ecologically sound food economy, has seen local farmers increasingly utilize expanding farmers markets, restaurants, and regional supermarkets in Southwest Virginia with organic produce and pasture fresh meats and eggs. Additionally, ASD has seen growth in Southwest Virginia's "green building industry," generating a new economy for landowners, eco-friendly loggers, wood manufacturers, and green builders.

"There has been tremendous energy around the revitalization of Southwest Virginia's economy through regional collaboration, emphasis on our culture and quality of life, and deployment of high speed telecommunications," said Senator William Wampler Jr.

"Heartwood will be a center showcasing our heritage, music, crafts and outdoor recreation assets. The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission will provide vision, guidance and resources to sustain those efforts."

More than \$17.7 billion in visitor spending and \$1.2 billion in state and local taxes for Virginia communities is generated through tourism – in addition to more than 208,000 jobs.

"As more travelers seek authentic, enriching destinations that are unique and offer experiences you can't find anywhere else – they are looking toward Southwest Virginia," said Governor Kaine.

"Initiatives like The Crooked Road and 'Round the Mountain have been tremendously successful in drawing travelers to the region, and with Heartwood and the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, we expect the area to continue seeing growth."